Thomas More

UTOPIA

LATIN TEXT AND
ENGLISH TRANSLATION

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INTRODUCTION

PART I: INTERPRETATIVE CONTEXTS

Utopia treats fundamental issues of human nature and society, and brings to bear on them a seldom-matched combination of classical learning, practical experience and depth and complexity of mind. Richly allusive and endlessly enigmatic, intriguing to scholars in several disciplines and inspiring to reformers and revolutionaries, More's little book has spawned an unusually varied interpretative tradition. As editors, we are not called upon to promulgate a comprehensive interpretation of our own – even if we could agree on one. We do, though, believe that any interpretation needs to take into account certain fundamental facts about *Utopia* and its background, and that it is our role to provide the necessary starting points for interpretation, by setting the book in its contexts in More's life and times, and in the history of political thought. In this process, Part I of the Introduction provides the broad outlines, and the annotations to the text fill in details; in turn, these annotations, together with the 'Brief guide to scholarship', point the reader to the most important texts on which a fuller and deeper understanding of *Utopia* and its critical tradition depends.

More to Utopia

Thomas More was born in London on 7 February 1478, or possibly 1477.[1] His father, John More, was determined that his eldest son should follow him into the legal profession. Thomas spent a few years at St Anthony's School, learning the fundamentals of Latin grammar and composition. At the age of about twelve, he was placed as a page in the household of Henry VII's Lord Chancellor, John Morton. (Morton was also Archbishop of Canterbury and, from 1493, a cardinal.) This placement was ideally suited to exposing More to the ways of public life, and to securing him a powerful patron. After two years at Morton's, the boy was sent to Oxford, presumably to sharpen the skills in rhetoric and logic that would be important to a legal career. He was then, at about sixteen, brought back to London to begin legal training in the Inns of Court.

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[1] See the most recent biography: Richard Marius, *Thomas More* (New York, 1984), p. 7.

During his years as a law student, however, More came increasingly under the influence of a group of literary scholars, central figures of the emerging tradition of humanism in England. As Paul Oskar Kristeller has taught us, Renaissance humanism was not a philosophical position but a particular scholarly orientation. The term 'humanist' derives from *studia humanitatis*, a Ciceronian phrase that came to designate a family of disciplines: grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry and moral philosophy.[2] In the Renaissance as in the Middle Ages, Latin was the normal language of learning. Beginning in the fourteenth century, humanists like Petrarch attempted to revive the classical form of that language; by the early fifteenth century, they had undertaken a parallel attempt for classical Greek. More studied Latin composition with the grammarian John Holt, and Greek under William Grocyn. He also fell strongly under the influence of John Colet. Like Grocyn, Colet had studied in Italy, the centre of humanist learning. After his return to England in 1496, he gave several series of lectures at Oxford on the epistles of St Paul, lectures that constituted the earliest English application of some of the exegetical and historiographical techniques of Italian humanism; later he became Dean of St Paul's Cathedral, and founded there the first of the humanist grammar schools in England. And in 1499, More made the acquaintance of the great Dutch humanist Erasmus, who in that year first visited England.

Indeed, at this period More seems to have been at least as intent on the pursuit of literary scholarship as of the law. He also seriously considered becoming a priest – doubtless in part because scholarship was almost exclusively the province of clerics. According to a biographical sketch of More that Erasmus wrote in 1519, for a time 'he applied his whole mind to the pursuit of piety, with vigils and fasts and prayer and similar exercises preparing himself for the priesthood' (*CWE*, VII, 21). In fact More seems to have tested his vocation not merely for the priesthood – a calling that, as Morton's example shows, need not have precluded a legal career – but also for a life of religious withdrawal. The biography by his son-in-law

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[2] Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic, and Humanist Strains* (New York, 1961), pp. 8–23.

William Roper says that at about this time More lived four years with the Carthusians, the strictest of the monastic orders.[3]

Eventually More made his choices. In late 1504 or early 1505, he closed the door to the priesthood and monasticism by marrying Joan Colt;[4] nor is there any sign, in the years following his marriage, that he thought of abandoning the law. Given the necessity of supporting a growing family – Joan bore him four children before her death in 1511, after which More married a middle-aged widow, Alice Middleton – he could scarcely afford to entertain such thoughts.

In the decade following his first marriage, More rose rapidly in the legal profession. Roper says that he was a member of the Parliament of 1504, and he almost certainly represented the City of London in that of 1510. In the same year, he began to act as a city judge, having been appointed an undersheriff of London. Increasingly he won assignments that drew on his literary and rhetorical as well as his legal skills. By August 1517, and perhaps somewhat earlier, he had entered Henry VIII's council.[5] His first conciliar assignment was as a diplomat, in a trade mission to Calais. And though his subsequent tasks spanned a broad range of activities, his main employment, before he became Lord Chancellor in 1529, was as secretary to the king. He also served frequently as the king's orator. And when Henry decided to write against Martin Luther (in 1520), More acted as his literary adviser and editor.

In the earlier part of his professional life, More also managed to carry out a substantial amount of independent scholarship and writing. It is striking how precisely his works of this period conform to the five associated disciplines of the *studia humanitatis*.[6] As grammarian (in the Renaissance understanding of the term), he translated Greek poems and four short works by the Greek ironist Lucian. As rhetorician, he wrote a declamation in reply to Lucian's *Tyrannicide*. (The declamation was a standard rhetorical exercise, a speech on a paradoxical or otherwise ingenious topic, often involving the impersonation of some historical or mythical figure.)

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[3] *The Life of Sir Thomas More*, in *Two Early Tudor Lives*, ed. Richard S. Sylvester and Davis P. Harding (New Haven and London, 1962), p. 198.

[4] On her given name, see Germain Marc'hadour, 'More's first wife . . . Jane? or Joan?', *Moreana*, 29, No. 109 (1992), 3–22.

[5] J. A. Guy, *The Public Career of Sir Thomas More* (New Haven and London, 1980), pp. 6–7.

[6] See Kristeller, 'Thomas More as a Renaissance Humanist', *Moreana*, No. 65–6 (1980), 5–22.

Erasmus reports a lost dialogue, evidently in the spirit of a declamation, defending the community of wives advocated in Plato's *Republic*. Several of More's longer, polemical letters of these years belong to the rhetorical subgenre of invective. As poet, he wrote, in addition to a few English poems, a large number of Latin epigrams. As historian, he practised the humanist genre of historical biography, in Latin and English versions of his unfinished *History of King Richard III* (a splendid, sardonic work that, having been incorporated into the chronicle histories, became the main source of Shakespeare's play) and in his translation of a biography of the fifteenth-century Italian philosopher Pico della Mirandola. As moral and political philosopher, he wrote *Utopia*. The publication of *Utopia* came near the end of this phase of More's literary career. Apart from three long polemical letters in defence of Erasmus and humanist learning, for several years after 1516 he wrote little other than what was required of him in his profession; and when he resumed writing books in the 1520s – works opposing the Lutheran 'heresy', and a series of devotional works – they no longer fitted the humanist categories.

The composition of Utopia

Utopia was conceived in the summer of 1515. In May of that year, More left England for Flanders, as a member of a royal trade commission. The negotiations conducted by this commission and its Flemish counterpart at Bruges were suspended by 21 July, but More did not return to England until 25 October. In the three months from late July to late October, he enjoyed a rare period of leisure; it was during this period that *Utopia* began to take shape.

At some point in the summer More visited Antwerp, where he met Peter Giles, to whom Erasmus had recommended him. Giles was a man after More's own heart. He was a classical scholar and an intimate of Erasmus and his circle; he was also a man of practical affairs, city clerk of Antwerp and as such deeply involved in the business of that cosmopolitan shipping and commercial centre. Book I of *Utopia* opens with a brief account of the trade mission, which leads into an account of More's acquaintance with Giles. At this point, the work glides from fact into fiction. More says he encountered Giles after Mass one day, and Giles introduced him to Raphael Hythloday, with whom they proceeded to have the conversation that is recorded in *Utopia*. This fictional conversation is presumably the transformation and expansion of actual conversations between More and Giles.[7] Be that as it may, More's visit to Antwerp served to crystallise and fuse a range of concerns most of which had (on the evidence of his earlier writings) been in his mind for years.

We have no direct information as to when More began drafting *Utopia*. In his biographical sketch, Erasmus reported that More wrote the second book 'earlier, when at leisure; at a later opportunity he added the first in the heat of the moment' (*CWE*, VII, 24). As J. H. Hexter argues, if More wrote Book II first, it seems very likely that he initially regarded it as a complete work; probably this version of *Utopia* was well in hand by the time he returned to England.[8] Back in London, though, he found reason to add the dialogue of Book I.[9]

Hexter points out that the first version of *Utopia* must have included not only the account of Utopia that now occupies all but the last few pages of Book II but also an introduction something like the opening of the present Book I. Otherwise it would not be clear who is speaking in the monologue on Utopia, and under what circumstances. The second phase of composition must have begun, then, not with the embassy to Bruges and the diversion to Antwerp but with the dialogue of Book I. Indeed the precise point where More, as Hexter says, 'opened a seam' in the first version of *Utopia* to insert the dialogue can be identified with some confidence (see below, p. 49n). After writing the dialogue, More must also have revised the conclusion of the work as a whole. In the final paragraph of Book II, as Hexter points out, the narrator recalls that Hythloday 'had reproached certain people who were afraid they might not appear knowing enough unless they found something to criticise in the ideas of others'. But Hythloday's censures occur in the dialogue of Book I (p. 53), so that this allusion to them must have been written after the dialogue.

The fact that *Utopia* was composed in this odd sequence presumably has implications for its interpretation. As with many other facts about the book, though, this one cuts two ways. On the one hand, it may suggest that More split open a complete, unified book to insert a dialogue which, though interesting in itself, doesn't really belong with the original material – that *Utopia* is really *two* books. Or it may suggest that More had second thoughts about the account of Utopia and saw a need to insert a new section which would be in effect an introduction to it. In any event, the dialogue affects our view of Utopia. For one thing, it gives us a much sharper sense of Hythloday, who is both our only source of information about the island commonwealth and its foremost enthusiast.

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[7] Giles seems to hint as much in the commendatory letter he wrote for the first edition of *Utopia*: see below, p. 25.

[8] See *More's 'Utopia': The Biography of an Idea* (Princeton, 1952; rpt with an epilogue, New York, 1965), pp. 15–30; *CW*, IV (*Utopia*), xv–xxiii.

[9] Hythloday's narrative of an imaginary meeting of the French privy council includes (pp. 83–5) references to Milan as under French control (it was recaptured by France in September 1515) and to Ferdinand II of Aragon as a force to be reckoned with (he died in January 1516). These allusions suggest a time-frame for the composition of Book I that is consistent with Erasmus' claim.

Shaping forces

More's book benefited greatly both from his experience in law and politics and from his humanist learning. Though the social problems *Utopia* addresses are perennial, the particular formulations of them, and the data of recent and contemporary English and European life that the book deploys, reflect More's personal and professional experience. But the intellectual paradigms that he brings to bear on the understanding of these problems, and the form and style of his book, derive primarily from his literary humanism.

The most obvious relation between *Utopia* and More's humanist learning is that with the central Greek works of political philosophy. The full title of More's book – *De optimo reipublicae statu deque nova insula Utopia* – identifies it as belonging to the oldest genre of political writing, the discourse on the ideal commonwealth initiated by Plato's *Republic* and *Laws* and continued in Aristotle's *Politics* – and subsequently in many other works. Plato's and Aristotle's discussions of the ideal commonwealth are, however, purely argumentative, whereas the Utopian part of More's book consists of Hythloday's fictional travelogue. The decision to present his imaginary society in the form of a long speech by a fictional personage is responsible both for much of the book's interest and for much of its enigmatic quality. Fictions are attractive, but in their very nature they are unapt to resolve into unambiguous meanings.[10]

For the debate of Book I, the primary formal models are the dialogues of Plato – and, perhaps even more, those of Cicero. Like

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[10] More's decision to present Utopia as a fiction has also been responsible for much of his book's influence: the literary genre of the utopia, which *Utopia* initiated, differs from the philosophical discourse *de optimo reipublicae statu* precisely in that it offers a fictionalised account of the ideal commonwealth as if it already existed. In the second of the two letters on *Utopia* that More addressed to Giles, he commented obliquely on the advantage of this way of proceeding. See p. 269.

Utopia and unlike the Platonic dialogues, Cicero's dialogues consist mainly of long speeches punctuated by brief interruptions; like *Utopia*, too (and like other humanist dialogues and again unlike Plato's), Cicero's dialogues are more concerned with expounding alternative positions than with reaching definite and prescriptive conclusions. There are also precedents for the main *topic* of More's debate, in humanist as well as classical literature. Arguing about whether Hythloday should join a king's council is a way of getting at the general, and very frequently discussed, problem of 'counsel': the problem of ensuring that rulers get – and take – appropriate advice. As Quentin Skinner observes, this problem could be approached either from the point of view of the ruler, in which case the focus is on 'the importance of choosing good councillors and learning to distinguish between true and false friends', or from the point of view of the prospective councillor, when the focus is on the question of whether a scholar should commit himself to practical politics.[11] Viewed in this second perspective, the problem amounts to one formulation of the ancient question of the relative merits of the active and contemplative lives.[12] Since, as Skinner says, 'humanists tended to see themselves essentially as political advisers', counsel was the political topic that most intrigued them. More himself had special reason to be intrigued: he had been edging closer to full-time royal service, and, in the period when he wrote the dialogue of Book I, seems to have been pondering a first invitation to join Henry's council.[13] This would be a professional move toward which all his training and experience as lawyer and diplomat pointed, and yet contemplating it would have prompted some anxiety in a man who was also imbued with the ideals of scholarly and religious detachment.

Though the topic of counsel is commonplace, More's treatment of it is distinctive. This is also the case with his treatment (in Hythloday's account (pp. 55–77) of a debate he had taken part in at John Morton's table) of the problem of theft, which expands into a general analysis of the condition of England. More's handling of these matters differs from that of most other social or political writers of the period in what we may call its systemic or holistic approach. As Hexter puts it, More sees 'in depth, in perspective, and in mutual relation problems which his contemporaries saw in the flat and as a disjointed series' (*CW*, IV, ci). He understands that the problem of counsel cannot be solved by sending a few wise men to court, because, in the existing structure of society, most of the people they would encounter there – including especially the rulers – are motivated by blinkered self-interest. Similarly, the problem of theft cannot be solved by punishing thieves, because theft stems primarily from poverty, which is in turn the product of a number of social factors. The polity as a whole is a complex network of reciprocally-affecting parts.

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[11] *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1978), I, 216–17.

[12] Influential – and durably interesting – treatments of this issue are found in Plato (*Republic* VI.496C–497B and Epistle VII) and Seneca ('On leisure' and 'On tranquillity of mind', in *Dialogi*), who make the case for non-involvement, and in one of Plutarch's *Moralia*, 'That a Philosopher ought to converse especially with men in power'. Cicero sees merit in both courses (*De officiis* I.xx.69–xxi.72, xliii.153–xliv.156).

[13] See Jerry Mermel, 'Preparations for a politic life: Sir Thomas More's entry into the king's service', *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 7 (1977), 53–66.

The social analysis of Book I is also distinguished by its passionate intensity, its pervasive moral outrage at the status quo. The analysis of the problem of theft constitutes a scathing indictment of a system of 'justice' in which the poor are 'driven to the awful necessity of stealing and then dying for it' (p. 57). The root cause of this situation lies in the pride, sloth and greed of the upper classes. Noblemen live idly off others' labour, and also 'drag around with them a great train of idle servants' (p. 59), who, when they are later dismissed, know no honest way of making a living. The practice of enclosure (fencing common land as pasturage for sheep) deprives farm labourers of their livelihood and sets them to wander and beg – or to steal and be hanged.

Though it is Hythloday who delivers this indictment, one can hardly doubt that it embodies More's own views; and in fact More portrays himself as concurring in Hythloday's analysis (p. 81). In the debate on counsel, however, More portrays Hythloday and himself as taking opposite positions, with Hythloday opposing involvement and More favouring it. Both positions are powerfully argued, and they are never bridged: at the end of Book I, the disputants simply drop the topic and go on to another – the desirability of abolishing private property – about which they also never reach agreement.

These facts suggest another aspect of the relation between *Utopia* and its author's character and experience: that the personality and views of More's two main characters project his own persistent dividedness of mind. That 'More' closely resembles the author is clear. Yet it is equally clear that this cautious, practical lawyer and family man is More without his passion and vision, a More who could not have written *Utopia*, nor ever have chosen martyrdom. The most obvious literary models for Hythloday – notwithstanding that his name is a Greek coinage that means something like 'nonsense peddler'[14] – are the stern experts on comparative politics of Plato's political dialogues. In the book's generic economy, Hythloday corresponds to the austere Stranger of the *Statesman* or the Old Athenian of the *Laws*, whose detachment from practical affairs enables them to see and speak the truth. But this is as much as to say that Hythloday is to some extent More's fantasy – partly wistful, partly critical – of what he himself might have been, had he made different choices a decade earlier; even as 'More' is his slightly deprecating representation of the practical man he had become.[15]

More's dividedness of mind is also related, via his humanist learning, to the seriocomic mode of *Utopia*. Here the key author is Lucian, four of whose works, as we noted above, More had translated. (These were published in 1506, together with some additional translations by Erasmus.)

A Syrian sophist of the second century AD, Lucian was one of the last writers of classical Greek. In a series of dialogues and other short prose pieces, he played a key part in the development of a tradition of making serious points under the guise of jokes, other examples of which are the *Golden Ass* of Apuleius, numerous mock orations and festive treatises (like those listed as precedents in Erasmus' preface to *The Praise of Folly*), and works of later writers like Rabelais and Swift. This tradition is sometimes characterised by the phrase *serio ludere* – 'to play seriously'.[16]

As More says in his preface to the translations of Lucian, this kind of writing satisfies the Horatian injunction that literature should combine delight with instruction (*CW*, III, Part I, 3); in his second letter to Giles, he indicates that this was why he chose a seriocomic mode for *Utopia*. But More was also attracted to the tradition of *serio ludere* for another, deeper reason. The divided, complex mind, capable of seeing more than one side of a question and reluctant to make a definite commitment to any single position, has a proclivity for ironic discourse; and *serio ludere* – in which the play can serve to qualify or undercut any statement – is one of the great vehicles of irony. The first major humanist work in the Lucianic tradition is *The Praise of Folly* (written in More's house in 1509). This is a declamation of bewilderingly complex irony, in which Erasmus has Folly (supposed to be a goddess) praise folly, thus setting up a sort of verbal hall of mirrors. The situation in *Utopia* is equally complex: a 'nonsense peddler' condemns Europe and praises Noplace (the meaning of the Greek nonce word 'Utopia');[17] and his views – many of which are clearly not nonsense – are reported by a character who bears the author's name, and who dissociates himself from most of them.

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[14] On the derivation, see below, p. 35n. Dominic Baker-Smith points out that Socrates is accused of peddling nonsense (Greek *hythlos*) in the *Republic*. See *More's 'Utopia'* (London and New York, 1991), p. 83.

[15] Hythloday also recalls Pico della Mirandola, who was to More a particularly intriguing modern exemplar of philosophic *otium*. On Pico and *Utopia*, see Baker-Smith, pp. 15–21.

[16] See, for example, Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, rev. edn (New York, 1968), esp. pp. 236–7, and Rosalie L. Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox* (Princeton, 1966).

Book I

The dialogue of Book I constitutes a debate on a course of action: should Hythloday join a royal council? Moreover, this debate encompasses several others, on questions of public policy. At Morton's table, the topic is that of the best policy for dealing with the problem of theft; and, after recounting this debate, Hythloday goes on to describe imaginary meetings of two royal councils, debating respectively policy choices in foreign and domestic affairs. Finally, the book concludes with an exchange on the merits of communism.

For a Renaissance humanist like More, steeped in the tradition of classical rhetoric, debates on policy questions could scarcely fail to be conceived and developed in accordance with the theory of deliberative oratory, the oratory of persuasion and dissuasion. (Deliberative is one of the three *genera* of classical rhetoric, along with the demonstrative genre and the judicial.) A fundamentally important consequence of the affinity of Book I with deliberative oratory is that the arguments of the book are uniformly structured by the central *topoi* of the deliberative genre. The *topoi* (of which rhetorical manuals, like textbooks of logic, provided long lists) are the catalysts of *inventio*, subject-matter categories that suggest apposite arguments for the different genres; in the deliberative genre, invention is channelled by two paired, dominant topics, *honestas* and *utilitas* – honour and expediency.[18] The deliberative orator

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[17] See below, p. 31n.

[18] On the key role of these topics, see, for example, Cicero, *De inventione* II.li.156–8, or Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* III.viii.1–3, 22–5.

The fact that *Utopia* is closely akin to oratory in *inventio* (and in *dispositio* or arrangement) should not be taken to mean that its *style* is also oratorical. More's book exemplifies the *genus humile*, the so-called 'plain' or 'Attic' style (see below, p. 31 and note). As Cicero explains in the *Orator* (XIX.63–4), the plain style is normally argues that a particular course of action is advisable on the ground that it is honourable, or on the ground that it is expedient – or argues that it is *in*advisable, as being either dishonourable or inexpedient. Naturally, the strongest case is made when it can be shown that considerations of honour and expediency point in the same direction.

This turns out to be the nature of Hythloday's argument not only on the problem of theft but on all the questions he addresses. The discussion of theft opens with the question of why this problem continues unabated despite the execution of so many thieves. Hythloday's response begins with, and is organised by, the contention that executing thieves is neither moral nor practical: 'The penalty is too harsh in itself, yet it isn't an effective deterrent. Simple theft is not so great a crime that it ought to cost a man his head, yet no punishment however severe can restrain those from robbery who have no other way to make a living' (p. 57). By contrast, Hythloday argues that the milder punishment he recommends is both just and expedient. Similarly, to 'More' and Giles he argues that joining a king's council would be neither honourable nor useful, since kings use councillors only to tell them how best to accomplish dishonourable and destructive ends. In his two narratives of imaginary privy council meetings, Hythloday portrays himself as arguing that the supposedly expedient courses recommended by the other councillors are both immoral and self-defeating. When 'More', at the climax of the debate on counsel, argues for an 'indirect', temporising approach, in which the councillor, knowing that he cannot turn all to good, will at least try to make things as little bad as possible, Hythloday responds that such a strategy is neither practical nor consistent with Christian morality. Indeed, we get the strong impression that he would say that the moral and the expedient *never* truly conflict, that correct analysis will always show that a dishonourable course is also impractical. This position links him with the Stoics, for whom (as Cicero explains in *De officiis*) the identity of the moral and the expedient is a key doctrine.

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characteristic of philosophical writing; the correct term for this species of eloquence is *sermo* ('conversation') rather than *oratio*. The comparative simplicity of the plain style should not, however, be confused with artlessness. The Attic stylist, Cicero observes, cultivates the 'non ingratam neglegentiam de re hominis magis quam de verbis laborantis' (77: 'not unpleasant carelessness on the part of a man who is paying more attention to thought than to words'). Cf. More on Hythloday's 'neglecta simplicitas' (30:11–12). More's observation that Hythloday's 'sermo' was 'subitarius atque extemporalis' (30:8–9) may be intended to recall another standard authority, Demetrius' *On Style*, where we read that the style of dialogue 'reproduces an extemporary utterance' (IV.224).

Evidently the question of the relation of the moral and the expedient interested More deeply, as it did other humanists. The claim that the two are identical was a standard theme of early humanist political thought, which is permeated by Stoicism; but in the fifteenth century, some Italian humanists began to assert that *honestas* is *not* always the same as *utilitas*. In 1513, Machiavelli produced, in *The Prince*, the most famous of all statements of this position. More could not have known Machiavelli's book (it wasn't published until 1532), but he certainly knew the tradition of thought that it crystallised.

It is also evident that the question of the relation of *honestas* and *utilitas* is linked with the subject of the best condition of the commonwealth. If the moral and the expedient – the practical – are ultimately identical, then it is theoretically possible to design a viable commonwealth that would always act morally. But if the moral and the expedient cannot be fully reconciled, then this ideal could never be achieved, even in theory.

That More recognised the importance of this issue to the theory of the ideal commonwealth seems clear from what follows the exchange about the indirect approach to counsel. The question of the validity of this approach is never resolved – surely because More was of two minds about it. In More's *fiction*, though, the question is left unresolved because it is sidetracked by Hythloday's sudden confession that he thinks the abolition of private property offers the only route to social justice. 'More' disputes this claim, not on the ground that communism is unjust, but on the basis of arguments (derived from Aristotle's critique of the *Republic*) that it is impractical. The commonwealth cannot be stable, prosperous and happy without private property and the inequality that goes with it. Hythloday counters that More would think differently if he had seen Utopia: for that commonwealth embodies the equality that More thinks impractical, and yet it is uniquely happy and well-governed, with institutions that are both 'wise and sacred' (p. 101). This, then, is the context that More provided for the account of Utopia: a dispute about the degree of compatibility of the moral and the expedient in political life, and in particular whether the ideal of equality is compatible with stability and prosperity.

Book II

If Book I of *Utopia* is affiliated with deliberative oratory, Book II has an equally clear connection with the demonstrative or epideictic genre, the oratory of praise or blame. Whatever More's readers (or

More himself) might think of Utopia, for Hythloday it is 'that commonwealth which I consider not only the best but indeed the only one that can rightfully claim that name' (p. 241). Praise of a polis or *civitas* was a recognised subgenre of demonstrative oratory, and a perusal either of Quintilian's discussion of the praise of a city or of the list of *topoi* for this subgenre in Menander Rhetor's treatise on epideictic raises the question of whether such passages may not have suggested some features of the order of topics treated, and perhaps a few of the topics themselves, in Hythloday's long speech.[19]

If the order and selection of topics in the account of Utopia to some extent reflect the dicta of rhetorical theory, though, the structure of the commonwealth itself certainly derives from *political* theory. First, More took many of the institutional arrangements of Utopia from the discussions of the ideal commonwealth by Plato and Aristotle, and from idealised accounts of historical polities and their lawgivers by such authors as Tacitus and, especially, Plutarch. These appropriations range from small (but often striking) items such as the Utopians' custom of having wives stand 'shoulder to shoulder' (p. 211) with their husbands in battle (which seems to have been inspired or authorised by a passage in Plato's *Republic*: see p. 213n) to fundamental features of Utopian life such as the restrictions on property and privacy, the institution of the common tables, and the heavy use, in the inculcation of desirable behaviour, of what we should call positive and negative reinforcement.[20]

Second (and even more important), the structure into which the borrowed institutions are fitted appears to have been constructed by applying the method for designing an ideal commonwealth devised by Plato and Aristotle. In this method, creating such a commonwealth is not simply a matter of piling together all the desirable features one can think of. On the contrary, the design premise is the principle of *autarkeia*, self-sufficiency: the best commonwealth will be one that includes everything that is necessary to the happiness of its citizens, and nothing else. Starting from this economical premise, Plato developed, and Aristotle refined, a four-step procedure for constructing an ideal commonwealth.[21] First, one must determine what constitutes the happiest life for the individual. This is the central question of ethical theory, and, as Aristotle explains at the beginning of Book VII of the *Politics*, its answer constitutes the starting point of political theory. Second, from these conclusions about the most desirable life, the theorist derives the communal goals whose attainment will result in the happiness of the citizens. Third, it is necessary to form a sort of checklist of the physical and institutional components that the commonwealth must include: a certain size of population will be required, and a certain kind and extent of territory; certain occupational functions will have to be performed; and so on. Finally, the theorist determines the particular form that each of these components should be given in order to assure that, collectively, they will constitute the best commonwealth. For More, most of these forms are (as we noted above) appropriated from Plato's and Aristotle's discussions of the ideal commonwealth and from idealised accounts of actual commonwealths.

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[19] Quintilian III.vii.26–7. Menander's treatise (without translation) can be found in *Rhetores Graeci*, ed. Christianus Walz, 9 vols. (Osnabrück, 1968; originally published 1832–6), IX, 127–330; for a summary, see Theodore C. Burgess, 'Epideictic literature', *University of Chicago Studies in Classical Philology*, 3 (1902), 109–12.

[20] Our notes to the translation call attention to many of these appropriations; fuller treatments of the subject are found in the commentary in the Yale edition, and in several monographs: Edward L. Surtz, SJ, *The Praise of Pleasure* (Cambridge, Mass., 1957) and *The Praise of Wisdom* (Chicago, 1957); Thomas I. White, 'Aristotle and *Utopia*', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 29 (1976), 635–75; and George M. Logan, *The Meaning of More's 'Utopia'* (Princeton, 1983).

An interesting question is whether More also borrowed from Renaissance discussions of the best commonwealth, especially those by Platina, Beroaldo and Francesco Patrizi of Siena. More never mentions any modern work; but since an aversion to mentioning modern works (however much one may happen to be indebted to them) is a convention of humanist discourse, the absence of allusions does not imply that he did not profit from such books. As the Yale commentary makes abundantly clear, there are many parallels between the account of Utopia and writings of these moderns, especially Patrizi. But it seems to be impossible to say whether the parallels represent borrowings, or simply the fact that More and the Italians read the same classical books.

Though there are many other useful things to say about Book II of *Utopia*, it seems beyond dispute, and fundamental, that the book presents the results of a best-commonwealth exercise performed according to the Greek rules. This fact is obscured by More's decision to present his results in the form of a speech in praise of a supposedly existing commonwealth – the decision, as it were, to invent the genre of the utopia instead of writing a work of political theory. This decision entailed suppressing or disguising the various components of the dialectical substructure of his model. But once we recognise that Book II of *Utopia* embodies a best-commonwealth exercise, some mystifying aspects of the work begin to make sense. In particular, this recognition tells us how to take the lengthy account of Utopian moral philosophy (pp. 159–79);

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[21] See Plato, *Republic* II.369B–372E; Aristotle, *Politics* VII.i–viii.

and it suggests an answer to a key question about the book: why did More create an imaginary commonwealth that seems (*pace* Hythloday) so clearly *not* ideal in some respects?

The passage on moral philosophy is in fact the cornerstone of the Utopian edifice: it constitutes the first step of the best-commonwealth exercise, the determination of the happiest life for the individual. The Utopians (who take it for granted that self-interest is the basic fact about human nature) maintain that pleasure is the goal of life, but they find that the most pleasurable life is the life of virtue. This is also the conclusion of Plato and Aristotle, but for them the virtuous life is that of contemplative leisure, made possible by the labour of slaves and artisans whose happiness is not a goal of the commonwealth. By contrast, the Utopians conclude that individual felicity is incompatible with special privilege, and think that the foremost pleasure 'arises from practice of the virtues and consciousness of a good life' (p. 175). Thus, though the Utopians are not Christians and their arguments consider only self-interest, they conclude that the best life for the individual is one lived in accordance with the moral norms of Christianity. Moreover, parallels between their arguments and passages in others of More's works confirm that he thought these arguments valid – though many readers have found them convoluted and strained.

But even if we grant that, for each individual, morality is always expedient, is this also true for the commonwealth as a whole? For the most part, Utopia supports this view. If, as the Utopians conclude, one's happiness is incompatible with spoiling the happiness of others, then it follows that the institutions of the commonwealth, whose goal is to maximise the happiness of its citizens, must be structured so as to implement the Golden Rule. Indeed, the institutions and policies of Utopia (many of which, as noted above, derive from previous treatments of the ideal commonwealth) are on the whole much preferable to those of European nations and are in many respects completely consistent with Christian standards, as those are interpreted in the writings of More and his associates.

Yet some Utopian practices are incompatible with these standards, and would seem to be justifiable only on grounds of expediency. To take the most disturbing examples, there is, first, the severe restriction of personal freedom. In Book I, Hythloday criticises repressive policies on the ground that 'it's an incompetent monarch who knows no other way to reform his people than by depriving them of all life's benefits' (p. 93), and this attitude harmonises with many passages in the writings of More's humanist